

A Jeweler's New Sign  
on the Rue Royale.  
Paris. Panel Bas-  
Relief of Bronze

of hair for the barber, a sort of double-ended snuff-box for the tobacco-shop, two red strips of cloth for the cleaner and dyer, a tin flag draped for the public laundry, a gilt plaque ornamented with a figure of Justice for the notary public.

And now are we to see again on the streets of modern Paris the sculptured shop-fronts, the graceful cornices, the burlesque and joyous signs of other days—signs which, better than any method of numbering, designated the hotel of the moment or the caterer à la mode? Perhaps we shall. A number of sporadic attempts have been made recently, and as to-day it is the fad for everyone to affect a love for antiquity, it may happen that before long our straight and poetic thoroughfares will regain a bit of their old-time charm.

At least so think a group of Parisians who, under the presidency of so distinguished a painter as Edouard Detaille have founded a society for the encouragement of the artistic sign. The Mayor of Paris has given the society his warmest approval, and this past November, under his auspices, the city held a "sign competition," to the success of which some of the wittiest of French cartoonists and some of the cleverest painters of the day contributed. Many of the designs exhibited found purchasers and will be put up on the streets.

But even before the opening of this exhibition a number of notable pictorial signs had appeared above the doors of Paris shops. Along the grand boulevards there are many that deserve to be noted, among them one of exceptional originality. It bears the inscription "Au Potier d'Étain" (The Pewter Mug) and was put up by a pewter merchant whose little shop never would have been noticed except for this most unusual sign. Out of the entresol window leans the upper half of a gigantic man, winking with a leer as he raises a pewter tankard to his lips. The sign-board below is itself cleverly lettered and decorated with grotesques, and the whole thing is so well colored and so striking in design that it indeed would be hard to pass without noting it. It is the work of Robida, the man who was responsible for the artistic reconstruction of "Old Paris" at the exposition of 1900.

In the Rue Chateaudun, over a store where prints are sold, Paul Hellen, the noted etcher, has placed a well-drawn woman examining engravings, and on the Boulevard Chichy there is a drug-store whose sign-board, modeled after a Louis XV. design, is a triumph of wrought-iron work and worthy to rank with any of its old prototypes in the Musée Carnavalet.

But certainly the most remarkable signs yet put in place are those planned by Willette, one of France's cleverest draftsmen and a man who will be remembered

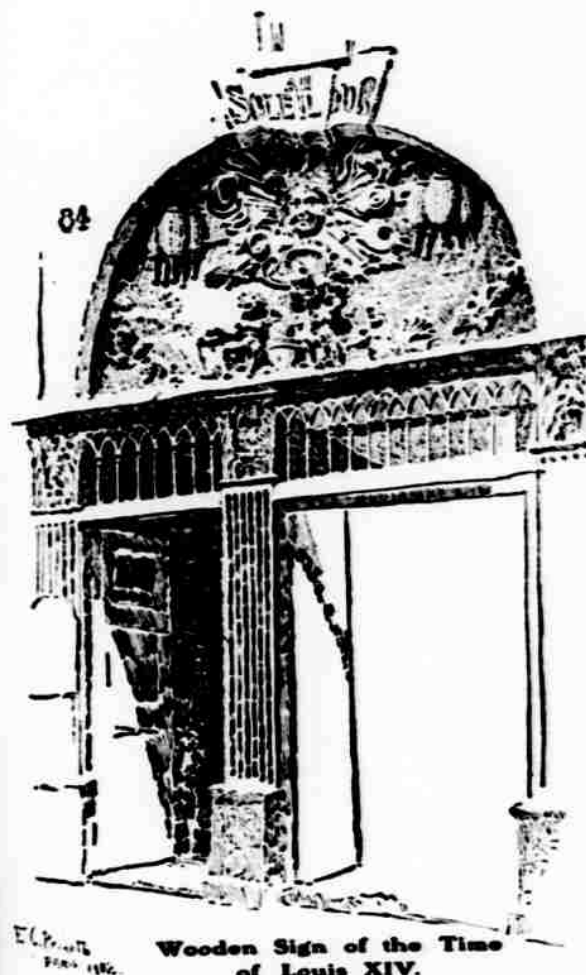


Willette's Sign for a Café—"Au General Bonaparte"

as the author, at the time of the Transvaal War, of the caricatures of Queen Victoria that so incensed England and nearly created international complications.

One of Willette's signs hangs over a noted book-shop on the quay opposite the Louvre. It takes the form of a large slab of wood of irregular outline hanging from a gilded bracket of fanciful design. The board is lettered in Old French printed in illuminated Gothic type. About a third of the space, cut away in an uneven oval, is filled with a piece of stained glass, representing the Madonna and child standing on a serpent, and relieved against a deep blue tone. From whichever side the sign is seen, and whether by day or night, the figure glows and attracts the eye to the inscription: "À l'image de Notre Dame" (Image of Our Lady)—a success assured from both a commercial and an artistic standpoint.

His other and even more striking design decorates the front of the café at the angle of the Place Saint Germain des Prés and the Rue Bonaparte. Some years ago, by a curious coincidence, this café was taken by a man named Lempereur. Being on the left bank and near the Latin Quarter, it soon became the resort of students and artists, who, Willette tells me, used to amuse themselves at the dead of night by yelling at the tops of their voices: "Vive l'Empereur! Vive l'Empereur!" until the police came, fearing an incipient revolution. But when they threatened to arrest the youngsters, these latter explained that they were only cheering the proprietor. And this reminds me of a certain shoemaker in Toulon whose name was Lemeil-



Wooden Sign of the Time  
of Louis XIV.

leur. He put above his shop the inscription, "Le meilleur bottier de Toulon" (The Best Boot-maker in Toulon). His rivals, incensed, brought proceedings against him, insisting that he must at least put a period between his name and trade; but of course they lost their case. But to return to the sign:

The café was renovated last year, and it was decided that Willette should do a sign for it. Both the proprietor's name and the name of the street naturally suggested something Napoleonic. So the artist has painted a panel, about six feet tall which he calls, "Au General Bonaparte."



Wrought-  
Iron Sign  
Worthy of  
a Museum

It is high in key, luminous and of striking effect. Napoleon, thoughtful, with the long black hair that he wore in his youthful campaigns, bestrides the classic white horse, pointing with his sword onward. On the croup behind him sits Fame, typified by an undraped female figure, whispering honeyed words in his ear. In her hand she carries the tricolor of France, and her great wings, outspread and gilded, play an important part in the decorative effect of the panel. Under the horse's hoofs lie the flags of all Europe. In the distance a vision is caught of the *Grande Armée*, with Willette's characteristic figures of the vivandière, the drummer-boy and the peppery old drum-major. Two royal crowns and a papal tiara hang upon the soldier's bayonet, the latter a rather sharp bit of satire, for, as Willette said, he put it in because the sign was to be placed in a religious quarter.

In each of his signs Willette has had a double purpose in view, namely, to combine the attractive in the artistic with the attractive in the business sense, and in both his signs he has succeeded admirably.

As I wander through the crowded American business streets, and see block after block of buildings, whose architectural features are almost buried under masses of signs, I wonder why our shopkeepers have not already realized that they can catch the public eye by other means than bright gilt letters of greater or greatest size. I wonder that our clever business man has not already perceived the uses of the pictorial sign, and decorated his shop-front with something distinctive and striking that the passer-by cannot miss.



Sign Indicating "Street of the Armed Man"